

Assemblyman
PAUL KORETZ

Forty-second Assembly District

proudly representing the communities of West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, Century City, Westwood, Bel Air, Brentwood, West Los Angeles, Hollywood, Hancock Park, Universal City, Studio City, and Sherman Oaks



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Koretz Reintroduces Bill to Raise Smoking Age to 21

AB 221 Will Restrict Youth Access to Tobacco and Protect Their Health

Sacramento – At a press conference at the State Capitol today, Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood) announced new legislation to increase to 21 the legal age to purchase tobacco and consume tobacco products. Koretz is regarded as one of the state's leading legislators in the fight to reduce young people's access to tobacco.

AB 221 is a reintroduction of Koretz's renowned bill last year, AB 1453. That bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee. Subsequently, in late session action, amendments identical to AB 1453 were inserted into a bill in the Assembly which then garnered a strong bi-partisan vote. That bill was not heard in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee.

"California has led the way in anti-smoking measures, and my bill is the next step in reducing teenage smoking," said Koretz. "According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 6.4 million children under age 18 alive today will eventually die from smoking related disease, unless current trends are reversed. Let's stop Big Tobacco and give teenagers what they deserve—a healthy future."

The current legal smoking age in California is 18, even though the legal drinking age is 21. The smoking age is 19 in Alabama, Alaska and Utah, but no state has a 21-year legal smoking age. According to a United States Surgeon General's report, smokers usually have sampled cigarettes at the median age of 14 but did not begin to smoke daily until the age of 18, and a small percentage began smoking after the age of 21. The Surgeon General also reports that "most people who are going to smoke are hooked by the time they are 20 years old."

"This is a very proud day for me. I hope California has the courage and wisdom to pass this bill and help save teens from this horrible addiction," said Dr. Leonard Klay, a Santa Rosa obstetrician-gynecologist who himself started smoking as a teen-ager. "I quit smoking," said Dr. Klay, "but it would have been a lot easier if I had never started smoking in the first place."

Dr. Klay introduced the 21-year smoking age as a resolution to the California Medical Association, which has long advocated for anti-tobacco efforts. When the policy was approved unanimously by the physicians in February 2002, it captured nationwide media attention. The CMA is sponsoring AB 221.

AB 221 will likely be heard in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee in March or April.

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